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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#)  
SUBJECT: MGLE01: HARIRI, HAMADEH DESCRIBE AS BOTH GOOD AND  
BAD THE IMPACT OF ISRAEL'S GAZA OPERATION ON LEBANON'S  
NATIONAL DIALOGUE

REF: A. BEIRUT 2222  
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 2221

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C/NF) In separate one-on-one meetings with the Ambassador on 6/30, MP Sa'ad Hariri and Minister of Telecommunications Marwan Hamadeh expressed basic satisfaction with the previous day's national dialogue session. Israel's actions in Gaza and the arrests of Hamas cabinet members and lawmakers cast a heavy shadow over the talks. With the Lebanese convinced that Israel's response to the Shalit kidnapping was disproportionate, Hizballah had fresh material to use in arguing that Israel will be forever hostile. But Israel's actions also had a positive impact on the dialogue, Hariri and Hamadeh argued, as the destruction of Gaza's civilian infrastructure demonstrated the dangers of Hizballah's tactics. Hamadeh claimed to have detected Syrian and Iranian messages of constraint on Nasrallah, who vowed to work to keep the Blue Line calm. Hariri, by contrast, claimed credit for Nasrallah's promises of restraint. Nasrallah also paid positive lip service to requests regarding UNIFIL renewal. Regarding disarmament of the Palestinian arms outside the camps, Hamadeh claimed that Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri proved to be an unexpected ally in thwarting Michel Aoun's attempt to blame the lack of progress solely on Fouad Siniora's cabinet. End summary.

NASRALLAH PROFITS FROM PERCEPTION  
OF ISRAELI DISPROPORTIONATE RESPONSE  
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[1](#)2. (C/NF) Hariri and Hamadeh's descriptions on 6/30 of the previous day's national dialogue largely tracked those of other Embassy contacts (reftels). They elaborated on the impact of the Israeli responses to the Gaza kidnapping of Cpl. Shalit. The dialogue atmosphere was initially quite "heavy," Hamadeh said, with the Muslims in particular feeling a sense of solidarity with the Palestinians. Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah profited from the Lebanese

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popular belief that Israel's destruction of Gaza infrastructure and arrest of lawmakers and cabinet members was disproportionate to the crime. Nasrallah "had the perfect examples" to use, Hariri said, in arguing that Israel was irrationally and eternally anti-Arab and not to be trusted. All dialogue participants, Hamadeh argued, had to

demonstrate their outrage against Israeli action. Instead of zeroing in on the problem of the "arms of the resistance," Hamadeh quipped, the dialogue focused too much on the "arms of the aggression," because of the news and pictures out of Gaza and the West Bank. "Of course we all had to say that Israel was the enemy," Hariri said; "look what's going on!"

HAMAS' TACTICS MIRROR HIZBALLAH'S,  
THUS LEBANON RISKS SAME ISRAELI RESPONSE  
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13. (C/NF) But there was also a positive impact on the dialogue of the Israeli action, Hamadeh and Hariri noted. Citing the news from Gaza, Walid Jumblatt argued forcefully to Nasrallah that Lebanon must not be exposed again to Israeli wrath. He and Boutros Harb took the lead in pushing the dialogue participants to consider a recommitment to the 1949 armistice agreement, adjusted as necessary. Nasrallah was on the defensive, Hamadeh argued, particularly when Jumblatt pointedly reminded the dialogue participants that what the Palestinians did to the Israelis -- infiltrate Israeli-controlled territory and successfully kidnap an Israeli soldier while killing others -- was exactly the m.o. Hizballah has tried repeatedly. Thus Lebanon had to be prepared to sacrifice its bridges, water lines, and electricity plants, if Hizballah actually succeeded in kidnapping an Israeli. Pressed by Jumblatt, Nasrallah admitted that Hizballah's military installations along the Blue Line had suffered extension damage by the 5/28 Israeli raids.

NASRALLAH PROMISES TO TRY  
TO KEEP BLUE LINE CALM  
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14. (C/NF) Nasrallah readily agreed to the request by some  
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participants that Hizballah not take any actions along the Blue Line in response to the Gaza operation. Asking the dialogue participants not to make any statements to this effect lest people try to challenge his restraint, Nasrallah said "leave it to me" to keep the situation in the south calm. He also promised to use Hizballah's influence and control to prevent any Palestinians from firing upon Israel.

15. (C/NF) Both Hamadeh and Hariri believed that Nasrallah was sincere in his commitment to try to keep the Blue Line calm (although both worried that any Israeli "provocations" might change Nasrallah's mind). But they differed on the reasons behind Nasrallah's vows of restraint. Hamadeh detected a Syrian and Iranian message to Nasrallah. "It seems obvious" that neither Syria nor Iran want to escalate the situation. Hamadeh said that, while the Israeli F-16 flights over Bashar al-Asad's summer residence did not produce the release of Cpl. Shalit, they may have provoked sufficient Syrian fears to keep Hizballah reined in. Hariri, by contrast, credited the intermittent dialogue he has conducted with Hizballah (although not lately with Nasrallah himself) as the essential factor in what seems to be a Hizballah decision to keep the Blue Line calm for now.

A "MODERATE" NASRALLAH ON UNIFIL  
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16. (C/NF) In general, both Hamadeh and Hariri agreed, Nasrallah came across as more moderate in this dialogue session than he had previously. Asked for additional examples of this moderation, Hamadeh said that Nasrallah had responded more positively than expected regarding UNIFIL. PM Siniora briefed the dialogue on UNIFIL's upcoming renewal, noting that he had received a letter from UNIFIL Commander Pellegrini regarding needed steps on the part of the GOL. Siniora noted that he was also under increasing pressure from the U.S., France, and others to show progress in asserting GOL authority in the south. While admitting that Nasrallah's

real feelings might prove to be different when time for implementation approaches, Hamadeh said that Nasrallah had been "surprisingly positive" when Siniora said that it was time that the Joint Security Forces (ISF and LAF combined) for the south was up to its full complement of 1,000 troops. Nasrallah said that he would help "facilitate" such deployment. Nasrallah also did not reject Siniora's call for a joint UNFIL-LAF planning unit, per the Pellegrini (and UNSC) request.

PREVIOUS DIALOGUE DECISIONS,  
AND PALESTINIAN ARMS  
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¶7. (C/NF) While General Aoun was mostly silent, when the subject turned to the implementation of the dialogue's previous decisions, he reportedly went on the attack ("that man is 100 percent Syrian," Hariri said in exasperation): Fouad Siniora's cabinet was a failure, responsible for the lack of implementation. Siniora reviewed the dialogue's decisions, noting that Syria had blocked the demarcation of Sheba'a Farms and the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations. On the disarmament of the Palestinian arms outside of the camps, Siniora said -- in a reference to Hizballah -- that "those who promised to help, did not." When Aoun protested and attacked Siniora again, Berri intervened, describing it as "unrealistic" that the government could shoulder the responsibility of Palestinian disarmament alone. While Hariri and Hamadeh acknowledged that the dialogue session did not make tangible progress on Palestinian disarmament, Berri's statement made it very difficult for Aoun to continue to claim that the cabinet alone is to blame.

CONSENSUS ON AL-QAIDA AS THE ENEMY  
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¶8. (C/NF) Hamadeh and Hariri shared the satisfaction that there had been unanimity in the dialogue about the dangers posed to Lebanon by al-Qaida. Al-Qaida is the "absolute enemy," "murderers not Muslims," Hariri said (using much stronger language than he had earlier in denouncing Israeli action). In a swipe at recent Lebanese attempts to liberalize some visa policies, Nasrallah said that there was a danger that al-Qaida members would infiltrate Lebanon not only by its land borders with Syria but also via the airport. This comment, Hamadeh said, elicited protests from some

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dialogue participants, who retorted to Nasrallah that he has plenty of people at the airport who could prevent this.  
FELTMAN